

[Robert and Ruby Kellum]

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Kellum, Robert and Ruby

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ROBERT AND RUBY KELLUM, CITRUS WORKER.

Sitting on the back door stoop with his youngest son, Nelson in his lap, playing tags at his knee was his other son Robert, Jr. Robert stated that he had just come from the United State Employment Office. He produced a card with his identification number on it showing that he had to report Tuesday if still unemployed. He said, "I have been picking fruit regularly since [the?] beginning of the season, but due to prices, nearly all of the crew have been laid off." If I am out of work three weeks, this office will give me half of what I would earn if I were working."

Ruby, his wife, came to the door and stood near a chair that was placed crossways in the door to keep little Nelson from crawling out while she attended her household duties. She was full of smiles on knowing that her husband had received his card.

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Robert is a young man, was dressed in overalls and wore heavy soled shoes, one slashed. Ruby's dress was clean but in lots of [places?] where it had been sewed together showed patching. Her shoes were run over. She was bare legged and had an old hat on. Her hair was not groomed. The little boys dressed in overalls were not clean, from playing in the sand and crawling on the floor. Little Nelson had a cold and his nose was continually running, he would wipe it with the back of his hand. He is teething and appeared to be very fretful. Little Robert was full of life and jumped around with glee.

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Robert said, "there is not much to life, only hard work from a youngster up to now. You are some time up and some time down. Here I have my little family and out of work." Robert was somewhat downhearted from being layed off for a short period. He said, "I was born in Macon, Georgia. October 28, 1912. My parents were Emma and Allen Freeman. My father I do not know very much about him. I now have a step-father Sim Kellum, who lives at 637 Silver Street, Lakeland, Florida. We have a pretty large family-my sisters, Elsie Lee age 21; Nettle Lee, age 19; and Maudine, age 16. My brothers, E.J. McCarthy, a half brother, The last time I saw or heard of him was back in 1937. Booker, age 23; Jac, age 26; Melvin, age 28, and Marion, age 10. All of my brothers are working at common labor.

Ruby said, " I was born at Cocoa, Florida, June 15, 1915. My parents left there when I was real small and settled in Monticello, Florida. My father Jerry and mother Rosa Glenn. Father is nearly sixty two years old, I don't remember the age of my mother. I have two sisters ind two brothers. Rosetta White, age 40, she lives at 601 Silver Street, Lakeland, Florida. Elizabeth Bells, age 30. My brothers Robert, age 38, he has three children Dorthina, Robbie Mae, and Doloris. I don't know their ages. Charlie Glenn, lives at Healthville, Virginia. I have been away from home nearly five years. Robert and I married here in Lakeland, February 16, 1935. Little Robert Jr. was born 5-31-36 and Nelson 3-17-38."

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Robert said, "I didn't stay in Macon, Georgia. My parents moved to Dublin, Georgia. We came to Lakeland in 1925. I think I was twelve years old and we have remained here ever since.

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Ruby was fond of her children, she said, "I want my boys to be good men, not like some of the sorry ones I see walking up and down the Street." Robert said, "yes I have started already to give them muscle. I want them to be strong."

"I hope they will learn more than I did in school, I attended the sixth grade in Monticello, Florida. Said Ruby." Robert said, "I only went as far as the second grade in Dublin, Georgia. When I came to Lakeland I attended the Washington Park Elementary School just a few days. I had to stop school to go to work, I always wanted to go to school, now I see what I have missed. Well along that time I had to obey my mother, we had to live. Now I see how other people lives, they have property and owns cars. I have neither one.

"I started doing hard work when I was small, that is all I know how to do. I will never forget the first job I had. I carried water for the McDonald Construction Company in [1925?]. I made \$ 9,00 a week. Later I worked for the Atlantic Coast Line railroad, on this job I made \$ 15,00 a week. This job I held down until 1932. After that I had to pick up odd jobs and later found work at Polk City saw-mill. There I was assistance fireman, I made \$ 15,00 a week on this job. When I lost out, I caddied for a while at the Cleveland Height Golf Course, until I began cutting fruit for the Highland City Association. They are located about eight miles from Lakeland. I have been making good up until a few weeks ago when they cut the crew off. I would average from \$22,00 to \$25,00 a week when we had plenty of fruit to cut."

"No, fruit cutting is not hard after you get use to it. The greatest thing is learning how to handle your ladder and cut without harming the fruit, you know they are pretty strict now about 4 cutting fruit. The biggest thing that you have to watch is the exposure. It will knock

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a man out if you follow it down. The early morning dew affects you. We pick every day when working , and Sunday also. I pick around 120 boxes of grapefruit a day, oranges 65to 70 boxes a day, and tangerines from 25 to 30 boxes a day. They pay us for grapefruit 4¢ a box, oranges 8¢ a box, and tangerine 10¢ a box. The prices ranges according to the size of fruit you pick. We work in crews of 14 or more. There is one foreman to each crew. The section where we pick mostly is the “Highland section.”

“This section is near Lakeland, and is thickly planted with fruit trees. We pick by the size, color, and grades. We are experienced enough to know what to do after instructed by our foreman.”

Ruby spoke up and said, “I have become Holy Sanctified. I am saved like the preacher. I ain't got all of the understanding, but I have to pray for wisdom. My mind is on nothing but the Lord. Satan is nothing but a common and evil mind. I fast when I received the Holy Ghost, you got to live the life. I go to church every night so far. The first time the Holy Ghost struck me, It put me on the floor, and I rolled over and over. It is like electricity in the electric iron if you happen to touch the wire, it will shock you. You don't know a thing until it is all over. I wish I had a Bible to read, that would help to make me stronger.” At this point she was promised one.

Robert said, “I am not anything now in the spiritual affairs, but I have a desire to be sanctified like my wife. I once joined the Bethel A M E Church, on North Dakota Avenue.

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I did'nt attend regular, sometimes I go now but not often.

“You know if I was fixed up like some people, maybe I would do better, that is, have nice things like they have. Now look I am out of work now. Suppose I wanted things and had to buy them on time, I would lose them now. That causes me not to go out as much as I would like to.”

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"I Wish I had a job like I had on the railroad, then I could do more. I have a nice bossman but he can only go so far. He is in the same fix that I am in. He has no one to boss when we are cut off, so that puts him out of a job."

While in his gloomy attitude about work, he was asked if he ever voted. He said, "I never voted, never had the opportunity to vote. I would not know how to vote. I think that we are better off now than we was during Hoovers time. Times were tough then, but now we do have something to do. This President beleives in giving people something to do. So far I have not had to go on relief- with this card I don't think I will ever go on."

"I have never been sick a day in my life, and as long as I keep my good health I don't think I will go on relief. I have had a cold, but soon got rid of it. All of our health is good. We never have had a doctor. When the children were born we hired a mid-wife."

Ruby had left us, and began scrubbing her floors. She opened the front door to allow the air to enter so the floor would dry quickly. Their little house is small, it once was used for a store. It is weather-boarded, onced painted yellow, now greatly in need of a paint job. The roof is covered with galvanized tin. The front porch is flushed with the street with 6 a long wooden shed over it. There is nothing on the porch. In the back yard about forty feet from the house is the delapidated out house. Their water has to be carried from the next door neighbor's house at a distance of fifty feet. They pay 25¢ a month for the use of the water.

The interior is simple. There are two double beds in the main room that is partitioned off. In this room also was two dressers, one covered with dishes. A small table covered with trinkets. The closet was built out from the wall and covered with cretonne. Four chairs were in places in the room. The furniture needed painting and was old fashion. The cut off kitchen contained a three hole burner. A few boxes nailed to the wall to hold the kitchen utensils and dishes. A small table was near the window. The curtain hanging at the windows were full of holes and looked soiled. The walls needed painting. The floors were bare, but kept clean by scrubbing.

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“Ruby said, We have to take our bath in the tubs that I wash out of , but it is better than nothing. I would'nt mind it if our landlord would turn on the water. It is lots of trouble to carry water for four people to wash with. My husband had to have his tub full of water every night when he comes in from work.”

“We have to pay \$ 1.00 for our house every week. We rent from Mr. Emory Bryant. If we could afford it we would move to some other place, but good houses are hard to find here in Lakeland.”

Little Robert was still playing around the knees of his father. He looked up and begged for a piece of bread, Saying, “daddy piece of bread, daddy piece of bread.” He called to his 7 wife to bring the children bread. Robert stated, I like anything except vegetables , like green and tomatoes.”.”

Ruby said, “I like greens and plenty of meat. Sometimes I cook corn bread. We are not able to get the food we need. In the summer we barely live. Now it is about the same. My children don't get the proper food, but the little rascals they keep fat.”

Robert was asked why he did not plant a garden. He stated that there was no fence around the place, and the neighbors chickens would distroy everything that you would plant.”

“When I am off from work I like to play checker, I like to see them play football, and baseball, I am not swift enough to play any of them myself. I like to see other people play games. I would read some if I had books to read. That would help me to learn some. Ruby said, “I get my pleasure in the house of the Lord. After a hard days work I feel better after going to church.”

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In leaving Robert's spirit was much better, and he asked that if there was any place where he could get books, he was referred to the Colored Library. The Little ones, said goodbye on leaving.